

ICPS newsletter®

Congressman accuses US Government of supporting Viktor Yushchenko

The US Congress has heard an appeal to cancel US technical assistance to Ukraine. According to one congressman, this assistance is being used to support Viktor Yushchenko's campaign without the US Government's knowledge, whereas the US President has declared the US neutral towards the Ukrainian election. ICPS believes that it is unacceptable to attack Ukrainian civic organizations that, at a crucial point in their country's life, took a strong position, declared the election rigged, and worked in defense of democratic values

Speaking before the US House of Representatives' Foreign Relations Committee on 7 December 2004, Congressman Ron Paul (R-TX) accused the US Government of supporting Ukraine's presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko through its technical assistance programs. Mr. Paul said projects financed by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Poland-America-Ukraine Cooperation Initiative (PAUCI) were a key source of financial support for Mr. Yushchenko. Senator Paul even offered ICPS as an example:

"Consider the Ukrainian NGO International Centre for Policy Studies. It is an organization funded by the US Government through PAUCI, but on its website you will find that the front page in the English section features a prominent orange ribbon, the symbol of Yushchenko's party and movement. Reading further on, we discover that this NGO was founded by George Soros's Open Society Institute. And further on we can see that Viktor Yushchenko himself sits on the advisory board!"

The Congressman clearly did not look into the matter deeply enough to find out that the only ICPS-PAUCI project, worth US \$4,500, was aimed at researching and developing methodology for designing regional small business development programs and had nothing to do with any election campaigns. Nevertheless, ICPS is genuinely surprised at the civic and political position of an elected representative from a country that has declared its adherence to democratic values throughout the world, in sharply criticizing a Ukrainian organization that has stood up against a rigged election. Congressman Paul had not heard or seen the scale of fraud during the first two rounds of

the 2004 presidential election in Ukraine. Yet his position can hardly be in agreement with the principles of US foreign policy. USAID program documents indicate that USAID activities aim at "fulfilling US foreign policy goals, one of them being expanding the global community of democratic countries."

The advance of democracy in post-Soviet countries means protecting civil rights, the most precious of which is the possibility to actively and consciously participate in fair and transparent elections, free of any pressure except for election platforms and the arguments of candidates who are vying for the post. The advance of democracy also means breaking free from soviet principles, that is, switching from single-party monopolistic ideology to democratic principles of transparent public policy that require that government decision-making take account of all legitimate interests and that it undertake transparent consultations with stakeholders. This new and very young capacity to express opinions, to have a personal "voice," is an absolute democratic achievement for post-Soviet society. Nothing of the kind was possible under conditions where all that was acceptable was single-party "unanimous" opinion. Technical assistance projects help us, Ukrainians, establish democratic institutions today instead of 50 years from now. Ukrainians overcame the soviet fear of government and lack of trust in each other, and took responsibility for their own most important political choice when they took to the streets on 21 November.

ICPS is a non-partisan organization and has not provided any institutional support to any of the candidates in the current presidential

In the latest issue of Political Commentary...

The rigging of the run-off presidential election in favor of Viktor Yanukovich led to massive protests in western and central Ukraine. The "Orange Revolution," born of the desire of voters to no longer suffer an undemocratic regime, proved exceptionally effective. It forced many government officials, civil servants, police officers, and even journalists to reexamine their position, because their tacit agreement was used by the Kuchma Administration to rig the election in favor of its anointed candidate. The second run-off on 26 December 2004 will most likely see Viktor Yushchenko take on the presidency. After this, Ukraine will have every chance of following the path of a democratic country with healthy political competition, a free media, and a strong civil society.

The Ukrainian uprising changed the European Union's perception of Ukraine as a European country. By not acknowledging the official results of the election, for the first time the EU went head-to-head with Russia over spheres of influence. It was supported in this by the US, which threatened individual sanctions against those in Ukraine who had organized the rigged vote. Russia's bet on Mr. Yanukovich created a crisis in Ukrainian-Russian relations. Should Mr. Yushchenko be elected president, these relations will be re-oriented to be primarily economic in nature. Moscow's influence over politics in Kyiv is likely to be dampened significantly.

election in Ukraine. However, ICPS did join the nation-wide protest against fraudulent elections, because such systematic, widespread rigging, unless stopped and punished, could destroy the future of a society of free people. We sincerely hope that this idea is supported by all those who understand the meaning of "human rights."

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A new political nation needs a new cultural policy

On 10 December 2004, the Ukrainian Club in Kyiv hosted a discussion of the idea of a new cultural policy for Ukraine. ICPS Deputy Director Volodymyr Nikitin, a PhD in cultural anthropology, thinks that the lack of suitable, qualified debate on how to tackle current problems and to form a model for the coexistence of cultures in Ukraine is a key problem in the country's current cultural policy

The conflict that arose when the official results of the run-off election were taken to court could yet lead to some kind of federal system and autonomic republics being formed in Ukraine. This situation only pointed to the abiding gaps in a cultural policy that has been given a bit of a facelift, but not really changed. References to the language issue and the need to protect cultural identity or religious preferences showed that different groups in Ukraine continue to believe myths about each other and about government cultural policies precisely because these issues are not regularly and thoroughly debated in the society as a whole. The emergence of these conflicts means that a new cultural policy approach is needed, one that will openly respond to the cultural expectations of various groups.

First of all, most participants agreed that the concept of nation-building on a purely ethnic basis has lost its supremacy and the concept of nation-building on a political basis is becoming more widespread and meaningful. In this situation, it makes sense for Ukrainians to:

- revise their traditional understanding of their cultural heritage and reject an approach that excludes all those whose ethnic origin is under question. For example, this means returning to the Ukrainian cultural field writer Nikolai Gogol and painter Ilya Repin, who gave the world its image of Ukrainian kozaks, or to include the grand ruins of Polish Roman-Catholic churches in Volyn oblast among the country's architectural monuments. In other words, to synthesize and enrich Ukraine's heritage, rather than rejecting human achievements on the country's soil;
- reject the mentality that can be seen in speeches by an intelligentsia that responds with mortal offence over what

Ukraine's neighbors or fate have wrought and to take responsibility for building a new future.

Second, it is necessary to identify what idea of development Ukrainians will use to build their nation and state. Should this be a "classic" consumer society, oriented on conformity and mediocrity or a society that balances different vectors, where cutting-edge technologies coexist with traditions and artisanship? The answer to this will determine the way that budget allocations and investment inflows into culture are regulated, and the content of education. Unfortunately, the society's orientation and the principles underlying its cultural policy are not debated at this level.

Third, Ukrainians need to decide which model of civilization they are applying to the processes of integration or partnership. If Ukrainians accept European values, then why, for example, is there no discussion about applying the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages in Ukraine, which was ratified back in 2003, but to this day has not been implemented? The provisions of this Charter go against the concept of an ethnic nation and for this reason the government was afraid to discuss it, let alone apply it. Moreover, these provisions make it possible to eliminate many conditions that might lead to linguistic conflict without resorting to calls for a second official language. In other words, it makes sense to analyze what it means to adopt European values, instead of trying to avoid confrontation at all costs and accepting only those things that do not require any effort.

One major "revelation" of the current electoral process was the fact that the large working units at plants and mines, especially in the east of Ukraine, have "preserved" soviet culture and values—and there is no policy in place to "un-preserve" them at this

time. Perhaps this will come with a policy of transforming worker "collectives" into employee associations with collective agreements and rights. Perhaps this will come in some other form. But it is impossible to ignore this phenomenon.

A separate set of issues is the issue of mass and information culture and its relationship to cultural traditions and the arts. Today, these issues bring up more taboos and myths than most. Perhaps, only the concept of Ukrainian history might contain more—this long history of insults and encroachments that makes it impossible to build a future.

There are many more questions, but a key flaw that needs to be fixed is the absence of social dialog on urgent issues around the country's culture and its future. Only through the process of dialog can a new cultural policy finally emerge.

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icps newsletter is a weekly publication of the International Centre for Policy Studies, delivered by electronic mail. To be included in the distribution list, mail your request to: marketing@icps.kiev.ua.

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